



# DEMOCRACY, COMPETITIVE MARKET ECONOMY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

Politics like economics has become more and more crudely competitive and value free. There are different schools of thought on whether crude competition in the economic realm has brought about universal human advancement but on the political front this principle of 'win what may' have ruptured democracies tearing social fabrics and polarised human generations.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Electoral democracy across the world is being subject to change not by political forces but by those forces which act as mediums for political communication. The pattern of political campaigns has been changing not at the behest of political actors nor the electorate but at the behest of the platform on which politics takes place. Electoral campaigns irrespective of the socio-political environment they take place in remain fiercely aggressive, extremely divisive and toxically polarising. One has to differentiate between reactionary electoral campaigns and progressive solution oriented electoral campaigns. Reactionary campaigns are more of problem centric campaigns which try to single out reasons for the present predicaments, most often these reasons tend to be superfluous - exploiting the gullibility of voters. An analysis of solution-oriented campaigns and regressive campaigns over the past few decades shows a clear decline in the former and a disproportional rise in the latter. Reactionary campaigns appeal to voter insecurities without even providing an alternate agenda. Immigrants are the reasons for all problems, Muslims do not belong here, Rohingyas are a curse; all though set out in different socio-economic frameworks these follow a close resemblance in narrative. A narrative that is nurtured with hate xenophobia and the culture of 'othering'.

## 2. ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY AND COMPETITIVE MARKET ECONOMY, THE INCOHERENCE:

Electoral campaigns in the day of social media and big data analysis have fundamentally changed the political paradigm of societies and states globally. We now have corporate companies the likes of Cambridge Analytica exclusively dedicated for what in modern parlance is called electoral management. When elections become a management-oriented PR work orchestrated by corporate entities the first and foremost catastrophe are the core values which were once closely knit together with the idea of democracy. The structural edifice which once facilitated the perpetuation of this values including a free media, a secular realm, a self-imposed moral code of conduct, an inherent respect for the institutions of democracy, a conscience to yield space for the political opposition all comes down crumbling. As Canadian political theorist C.B MacPherson prophetically asserted that the greatest threat to democracy is when the dynamics of market mechanism takes over and democracy is reduced to a meagre quest for votes where instead of material goods votes become the trading commodity. Once these dynamics are universally agreed upon and the quest for votes resonates the quest for market goods political narratives change fundamentally.

It becomes evident for a market-based institution directly represented by a political party or one such hired by party that Polarisation or the theory of divide and rule which have been in use since age old times as the easiest way to garner support and usurp power with the investment of minimal political and economic resources. But democracies across the world have foreseen such threats and have created a vibrant safety net of regulatory regime to prevent such irregularities. Every democratic constitution have caveats within their constitution to disincentivise divisive politics. But an area where states across the world tend to yield relatively lesser regulatory authority is the realm of internet or in particular the social media. Social media across the globe is mostly self-regulated regulatory principles vary from platform to platform and many are politico legally out of reach from the state apparatus owing to its foreign origin. This laxly regulated medium with large scale participation is where the electoral management entities operate. They mine data at will with or without the consent of the user get back to them with targeted ads work towards creating an echo chamber of opinions around a user, propagate hate campaigns promote the culture of othering and end up polarising the whole political fabric. Thus, social media becomes a place where the market forces of democracy can operate without any form of accountability or inhibition. The caveats democratic constitutions have created to prevent polarisation of electorate as an easy way to power falls far behind when it

comes to the new media platforms.

## 3. CASE STUDIES ON ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT ENTITIES:

Various case studies on electoral management corporate entities have drawn out a pattern resembling the same. Cambridge Analytica's involvement in various African elections have been pointed out as one of the earliest involvements of outsourced social engineering influencing electoral results. Researchers trace back the involvement of Cambridge Analytica in Africa to the 1994 South African elections. Reports suggest that The African national Congress has hired an electioneering company which researchers believe to be Cambridge Analytica to reconcile the differences that existed within the anti-apartheid regime. More recently whistle blowers at Cambridge Analytica have brought about the more recent involvements in the re-election of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and in elections in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is a classic example of an actively managed polarisation campaign. Trinidad and Tobago is a multi-ethnic society predominantly dominated by two groups sharing an almost equal demographic weightage, the African origins and the Indian origins and both groups had their political parties representing their respective ethnic groups. Cambridge Analytica was hired to work with the political party which represented the Indian group. There was a deliberate attempt to widen the already existing social fault lines between both the groups and above that Cambridge Analytica launched a campaign named DO SO predominantly over social media platforms and targeting the youth in particular. The campaign was an apolitical drive to not vote a resistance not only against the government but politics and voting in general. Both the Indian and African youths participated in the campaign on a large scale but when it came to voting all the Afro Caribbean youth who were part of the DO SO campaign chose not to vote but their Indian counterparts though were active with the DO SO campaign did vote at the insistence of their parents and according to their parents political preferences. The results were obvious the United National Congress representing the Indians won a closely fought election by a six-percentage margin. So essentially what Cambridge Analytica was doing was undermining the whole idea of free and fair elections by incentivising a large section of people not to take part in the democratic process. For facilitating this feat, they used data gathered from voters without their consent and was using them against their own interests. One has to also take into factor that companies like Cambridge Analytica have no legal obligations to the state of Trinidad and Tobago which essentially means what corporate entities of these likes are doing are opening up avenues for foreign involvement in national elections. As much as it is a threat to democracy this outsourced model of electioneering also poses serious threat towards the sovereignty of nation states.

## 4. THE POLITICS OF THE US VS THE POLITICS OF THE OTHER:

The pattern where one group is identified, 'otherised' and demonised and a political party or as we see more often the enigmatic authoritarian leader who would not compromise a bit on dealing with, and giving what is due for the otherised demons is projected as the saviour of the majority group: the supreme leader who is going to make your country great again. Once this pattern is well established and networks are built upon using modern tech platforms then translating this age-old tested methodology into electoral gains with the help of data analytics and targeted campaigning becomes a walk in the park. The most potent example of this political pathology where to be seen in the Weimar Republic leading up to the Nazi rise though not with the help of modern technology Nazis made use of propaganda to a scale that was unparalleled in the world of those times. But that was decades back and, in a world, whose fundamental organising principals were strikingly different from ours. The post-world order has never been immersed in a hate wave of this magnitude and reach. And two democracies one the world's oldest and one the world's largest with two entirely different social psyches and socio-economic frameworks which served as signposts that democracy can work its magic through any diverse social fabric too have succumbed to

this majoritarian onslaught does not definitely help in foreseeing a lush future for democracy.

This concerted market led effort coupled with the dynamics of social media big data can tear apart the post war world order if not regulated and reigned in. But such regulations or data protection narratives seldom make it to the mainstream political discourse as a result there is not much being done across the world to reign in this colossus except barring the likes of a European Union.

#### 5. TARGETING THE PRESUMABLE:

But the question arises aren't these tech platforms available for every political formulation and these platforms most often do not discriminate among political ideologies and even if it discriminates its mostly right winged content that gets censored and suspended. So then how would one correlate this majoritarian onslaught on democracy with social media and technology in general? For that one may have to go into behavioural patterns, political psychology and data analytics that determines voting pattern and voter behaviour, though social media platforms try to be neutral they have an inherent bias for hateful content it is much easier to convince a person without strong clear political opinions whom controversial data processing firms like Cambridge Analytica would call 'presumable's. A 'presumable' is easily convinced in a 280 word tweet that immigrants are taking away his/her job and that the immigrants are the source of most of his/her economic woes, on the contrary convincing a 'presumable' that a robust economic or tax package is what that could revamp the economy and generate more jobs and how immigrants are an integral part of their national economy. For a non-opinionated working-class person who got no sufficient time to grasp on to the intellectual socio-economic causes of his/her predicament, an easy narrative is always a way out.

Social media echo chambers and targeted campaigns reinforce this anti-immigrant feeling to a point where the hatred is legitimised. A normal ethical god-fearing moral person sheds the stigma associated with blatant hatred and ends up cherishing hatred in the new found social setting which legitimises and celebrates his/her hate. This legitimated hate makes sure he/she won't have any moral ramifications the next time he asks to deport all Mexicans or call out Muslims as terrorists. Once he is on board then there is no going back as hatred most often is an inclined plane from where it is too hard to return. The function of the echo chamber is to give legitimacy. The veracity of an information or argument is not checked upon its factual quotient but on its numerical quotient that is any argument that has considerable numerical support becomes legitimate irrespective of its factual quotient.

#### 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

Liberal democracy prevailed as the most legitimate form of responsible government because it associated with it certain values which were inherent to the whole idea of democracy. We have now reached a stage where it has become impossible to hold back the outgrowth of the principle of competitive market economy into our political and social life. The fundamental shift in democracy happened not just with the influx of social media it happened well and way before when our economy was subjected to a transformation based on crude principles of competition. That crude competition slowly and steadily began to creep first into our social life and then into our political life. The principle of competitive market economy where winning at any cost is the lone concern when applied to the democratic electoral process becomes the Frankenstein monster that we see today and call by many names' divisive politics, polarising politics, hate politics, propaganda politics and so on. So, every attempt at regaining our democracy should aim towards de-hyphenating our political philosophy and economic philosophy. Making sure that our politics is not organised on the crude principles of competition on which we organise our economy. That said such a process is a long hauled one and would need sufficient time and political investment. As of now we may not be able to but democracies across the world should aim at reigning in more robust data protection laws, incentivising social media platforms to self-regulate, disincentivising private electoral management entities, hold hate speech on social media accountable, check the spread of misinformation and fake news, renegotiating the idea of anonymity on social media and revamping their legal frameworks in tune with the technological developments.

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